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version was to have an *universal* effect, in confining the diffusion of religious knowledge. But let us candidly examine, whether its admission or rejection be *really* a matter of importance. I know but little of the Irish in the South. But I know, that in the North, the Catholic peasantry make not the least objection to either reading or purchasing the common Bible. I know that most of them have it in their houses: that they are *not prohibited* by their clergy from having it; and that they very seldom have any other. Indeed, numbers of them, who are perfectly well acquainted with the Scriptures, are entirely ignorant that there is such a book in existence as the Doway Bible. Of this fact I had lately a most conclusive instance; For, being desirous of perusing that book, I sent to borrow it from different Roman Catholics in the parish where I reside; when, to my surprise, not one of them had it; few of them had heard of it: but they all were in possession of the common Bible. I next applied for it to a respectable bookseller in the town of Lisburn; but he said "he had no demand for it, and therefore did not keep it." I much doubt, therefore, whether the want of this edition is in any respect a drawback to the disseminating the Scriptures, *even in these Kingdoms*. But if its absence from our Societies does really prevent a single individual from enjoying the pure light of heavenly truth, I should most sincerely wish for its presence, *provided* we could have it without the appendages attached to it by erring mortals. I am too much of a *Freethinker* to wish for it on other terms.

M——D.

Lambeg.

N.B. The writer of the above is quite ignorant of the real signature of the "*Freethinker*;" nothing personal can therefore be intended.

To the Proprietors of the Belfast Magazine.

WITHOUT intending to give offence to any of your worthy correspondents, I shall attempt to say a few things in behalf of that poor fellow known by the various signatures of "H.H.H.," "D.," "William," &c, to whom, in a late number of your Magazine, the whip has been applied with considerable energy; and who must have most sensibly felt the smart, for his perhaps somewhat barefaced plagiarisms. Some may allege, that to such a person feeling is not very applicable, and that the scourge has been exercised in vain. It must be acknowledged, there is a happy callousness of heart, which is sometimes the concomitant of dullness of head. Those who possess these qualities in any superior degree, are proof against the keenest invectives. Under an impenetrable coat, they can, in drowsy serenity, trudge along the path of life, disregarding censure's bitterest blast.

"O, Dullness, portion of the truly blest,
Calm shelter'd haven of eternal rest.—"

—So heavy passive to the tempest's shocks
Strong on the sign post stands the stupid ox."

But surely this gentleman is not so insensible, who *thus humbly* aspires to the high honours of poetry; that description of fine writing whose very essence is sensibility and sense. Taking this for granted, and supposing his nicer feelings to be much hurt on this and former occasions, as also, that he may blush to come forward in his own defence, in the face of a censorious world, permit me to apologize in a few hints to the discerning reader.

Bad poets have been exposed to ridicule in all ages; but plagiarists are not bad poets. They would willingly present to view those things that are not in the hands of all, to

which every one may not have access, that are partly forgotten, little known, or at least innocently conceived to be so. Modestly diffident as to the energy of their own minds; they content themselves in the humble use of the mental capacities of others. Something like this, so great a man as Addison recommends: No, 106 of the Spectator, he says, "I could heartily wish that our country clergy, instead of wasting their spirits in laborious compositions of their own, would endeavour after a handsome elocution, and all those other talents that are proper to enforce *what* has been penned by *greater masters*." If this be not a recommendation of plagiarism in writing poetry, it certainly is in the more important business of sermonizing. Addison's advice has been often taken, particularly as it respects dereliction of laborious composition, and oral publication of what has been indicted by others. If the modern divine preaches verbatim, as his own, a father's sermon of the last century, and receives applause for his excellent discourse, why not grant a little surreptitious fame to the fond bardling, whose poetic ambition is so *very easily* gratified. Fragments of great works might be entertaining to the cursory reader, who has little time, and less taste, for travelling with the poet through all his tedious digressions and episodes. Should any say, what is taken from others should at least be acknowledged. Must the prim beau, who struts forth to make the most of himself for a day, be obliged to publish, that his fashionable suit is borrowed; and in the very place too where he expects most honour and success. Owing to their delicacy of taste, and superior refinement, poetry has ever been a favourite of the ladies: who knows, but the bard's borrowed plume might

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captivate the heart of an admired fair one, and in a moment realize the ardent wish of his amorous heart.

The poetic honours of the plagiarist may be supposed to be very short lived. Multitudes of poems, that have a fair claim to a species of originality, live no longer than till they are once read, and many of them not so long. What pleasure; it might be asked, can the authors have, in issuing to the world those productions which must so shortly sink into oblivion. The whole period of the existence of the Ephemeron, or May-fly, is not reckoned more than five hours at most; "and yet," says Doctor Mavor of these creatures, "limited as their duration is, they perform every office of nature, propagate their kind, enjoy their pastime, and their food, and seem to live in as much felicity as the contracted space of two or three hours will admit."

Plagiarists do with a good degree of openness only what some are blamed for attempting with a more secret and premeditated deception. Conscious of the ability and strong inclination of men to expose the mere copyer, and especially of the thief to detect the thief, they make up some one thing out of twenty others. A clause is adopted from this source, and a phrase from that, particles are changed, new, and frequently less apt, epithets are introduced: here an idea is stolen, and there a mode of expression. From many a remnant a strange piece of patch-work is at length completed, to which the artificer would give the name of an original poem. This kind of composition is like what the poet calls, "A past, vamped, future, old, revived, new piece."

It may appear a little bold, to endeavour to have that placed under the title of original poetry, which has been transcribed word for word
D D

from a book. But, before your zealous expositors of the plagiarism will formally exclude him, for ever, from all employment in the Republic of Letters, they will please to consider, that originality is a very rare thing in the world, and might we add, especially in the poetical world.

The man who thinks for himself, who culls not here, nor plunders there, but produces what his own stock of common sense and observation supplies, is in one sense of that term, an original. Nor is he to be denied this honour, because others have fallen upon the same ideas before him; if by such ideas he has not profited. To every subject certain essential properties belong: those, therefore, who write on the same topic, must have similar ideas. Two correspondents might, by the same post, transmit to your office, thoughts very similar on the same theme. Each would be entitled to the credit of being an original, provided one did not borrow from the other, and neither from a third. He therefore labours under a mistake, who would charge an author with want of originality, with borrowing, or any species of plagiarism, in having published what was the production of his own mind, but what, in the substance of it, the critic has been able to discover was published before. The production may not be original to the world, but it is to the author.

But if by originality is meant something new, that has not been known, heard of, or said before, this is what is asserted to be very rare. The wise monarch of ancient Israel puts this question, "Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See this is new?" Sterne, so great an original as many have reckoned him, yet upon that score has not obtained universal credit. The immortal Pope says, "Epic poets have

followed Homer in every episode and part of story. If he has given a regular catalogue of an army, they all draw up their forces in the same manner. If he has funeral games for Patroclus, Virgil has the same for Anchises. If he gives his hero a suit of celestial armour, Virgil and Tasso make the same present to theirs." But what is more, "Virgil has not only observed this close imitation of Homer, but where he has not led the way, supplied the want from other Greek authors. Thus the story of Sinon and the taking of Troy, was copied, (says Macrobius,) almost word for word from Pisander; as the loves of Dido and Eneas are taken from those of Medea and Jason in Apollonius." If this last was not plagiarism, it was something very like it. And if Virgil was not an original, who is? The following of Homer's plan as the invariable law of the *Epopée*, does not invalidate the force of the above reasoning. It would be difficult to prove, that even Homer himself had not a predecessor or a precedent.

The sly quack, the illegitimate son of Esculapius, copies a recipe from Buchan, accidentally restores his patient to health, and receives credit for profound skill in medicine. In the art of healing, is not the prudent and judicious physician often the servile follower of London practitioners, or some such modern guides? The pedantic school-master, surrounded by his admiring pupils, boasts of his genius and erudition; when all his apparent dexterity is stolen from the key and the translation; nay, the author of the key, and the translator may have themselves ploughed with the heifer of another. The stories of an *Encyclopædia* of wit, and similar publications, are detailed, from day to day, for the entertainment of company, by the conceitedly facetious gentle-

man, and fond pretender to wit. Do not the learned in the law display their judgment and eloquence, and successfully plead the cause of their client, by the multitude of statutes, precedents, and authorities, which they are able to quote. The editor of a provincial print, with his neat little *plagiatic* scissors, clips a scrap from this, and that newspaper, or other periodical publication; and thus furnishes materials to fill the columns of his own gazette.

The day and the night, morning and evening, the sun, moon, and stars, the seasons, the sea, the shore, the sky, the clouds, the storm and tempest, the battle and war, have been subjects of poetic description, from age to age, since the earliest times, with much sameness of ideas and similarity of manner. What modern poet, of talent and celebrity, has not copied from Ovid, and Virgil, Horace, and Homer? While poetsasters, incapable of plagiarising from classic originals, are content to follow inferior masters.

If what has been said be true, plagiarism and want of originality are no peculiarities in composition. If they are faults, like many other human foibles, they are common. The critic may allege that prevalence of error is a bad apology for its indulgence: a multitude of thieves will not justify dishonesty. True. But why should one poor plagiarist be singled out from the crowd, and the hue and cry of catch the thief be raised against him; while many of his contemporaries and predecessors, more or less chargeable with the same crime, have been allowed to wear the laurel, and compliment themselves with all the honours of invention, originality, and genius?

S.E.

Ballynahinch.

For the Belfast Monthly Magazine.

THE ANSWER OF JOHN MILTON TO THE REPRESENTATION OF THE PRESBYTERY OF BELFAST, PUBLISHED AT PAGE 95 OF OUR LAST NUMBER.

WE have now to deal, though in the same country, with another sort of adversaries, in show far different, in substance much what the same. These write themselves the Presbytery of Belfast, a place better known by the name of a late barony, than by the fame of these men's doctrine or ecclesiastical deeds; whose obscurity till now never came to our hearing. And surely we should think this their representment far beneath considerable, who have neglected and passed over the like unadvisedness of their fellows in other places more near us, were it not to observe in some particulars the sympathy, good intelligence, and joint pace which they go in the North of Ireland, with their copartening rebels in the South, driving on the same interest to lose us that Kingdom, that they may gain it themselves, or at least share in the spoil: though the other be open enemies, these pretended brethren.

The introduction of their manifest out of doubt must be zealous; "their duty," they say, "to God and his people, over whom he hath made them overseers, and for whom they must give account." What mean these men? Is the Presbytery of Belfast, a small town in Ulster, of so large extent that their voices cannot serve to teach duties in the congregation which they oversee, without spreading and divulging to all parts far beyond the diocese of Patrick or Columba, their written representation, under the subtle pretence of feeding their own flock? Or do they think to oversee or undertake